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The Ancient Apse of Deerhurst Church

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THE ANCIENT APSE OF DEERHURST CHURCH.

BY THE REV. GEORGE BUTTERWORTH.

EVER since the publication of Mr. J.C. Buckler's interesting account of the Priory Church of Deerhurst in the Society's Transactions, Vol. XI. (and, indeed, from a much earlier starting point), it has been the wish of many to ascertain, if possible, what was the actual form of the Apse of this well known Primitive Romanesque building. Mr. Buckler having to frame his judgment upon very slender evidence, viz., that afforded by 12 ins. of extremely rough walling forming the commencement of the apse on the south side, pronounced, positively, that it had been pentagonal. However, as this shape is very unlikely to have been adopted in a building of the Saxon period, he felt himself obliged to suppose that the existing fragment of wall represented an apse of a later date than that of the rest of the building, in spite of the herring-bone work which characterises the former, and that possibly it had taken the place of an earlier semi-circular apse. But not a few persons, among them the writer of the present lines, were unable to acquiesce in the opinion that the shred of wall remaining above ground was really a part of a straight-sided apse: to them it seemed rather to suggest a curve. I am glad to be able to announce that on the 24th September of the present year (1889), by means of excavations made on the spot, I found myself in a position to decide authoritatively the question. The shape was without doubt semi-circular; and there was never a polygonal apse. There happened to be considerable difficulty in the way of effecting an entirely satisfactory examination. The greater part of the site of the ruined sanctuary of the church is occupied by a cider house. However, the tenant of the Priory, Mr. Wm. Phillips, obligingly allowed me to make excavations both outside, and within, this erection. Within the building, the *outer* face of the wall of the apse was uncovered for the space of 7 feet, just at the crown of

the curve. Outside it, we struck upon the *inner* face of the north wall, before the commencement of the spring of the curve, and followed it for 7 feet beyond the spring. This section gave us also, in its terminal portion, the *outer* face of the wall. The wall is $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet thick—the general thickness of the walls of the ancient part of the church being about $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet. We were able, in spite of obstructions, to open a small third section, which presented to the eye a portion of the outer face of the hidden wall. The examination was completely satisfactory, demonstrating the existence of an apse of a curved form, as well as the non-existence of any subsequent polygonal apse. There can be no reasonable doubt as to the preservation, beneath the surface of the soil, of the entire, unbroken span.

The dimensions of the ancient sanctuary are these:—space between the crown of the curve and the chord, $9\frac{1}{2}$ feet; from the chord to the line of the arch separating the sanctuary and choir, $8\frac{1}{2}$ ft. Thus 18 feet = extreme length of sanctuary.

Mr. Buckler observes, in his remarks on Deerhurst, that “a Saxon apse remains to be discovered. It would be an interesting revelation to make at Deerhurst.” Thus the accomplished writer almost anticipated the present “revelation”; he erred only in imagining that traces might also be found of the straight-sided erection, of which, as it now appears, he himself was the sole architect and builder.